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Testimony in Support of SB 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program

To the Honorable Chairs:

My name is Dr. Perri Klass, and I am writing today in support of Senate Bill 209. I serve as National Medical Director of Reach Out and Read, am a practicing pediatrician at Bellevue Hospital and a professor of journalism and pediatrics at New York University.

As you know, Reach Out and Read is a national nonprofit organization that has, since its founding 25 years ago, changed the way pediatricians practice medicine. Reach Out and Read gives doctors an evidence-based strategy to promote both child development and learning. During every well-child visit from 6 months through 5 years of age, doctors “prescribe books” to children to take home and keep, and offer parents concrete tips and encouragement on reading aloud with their children.

Everything that we learn about the word gaps in children growing up in poverty, about the developmental windows in early childhood, and the importance of parenting in those critical years, reinforces the need to intervene during a child’s earliest years. Indeed, this June, the American Academy of Pediatrics—drawing from its focus on Early Brain and Child Development—issued a new policy statement recommending that pediatric practice should include counseling parents to read aloud and providing books to children in poverty.


Reach Out and Read not only reaches children during this critical window, but it is an intervention with a strong evidence base demonstrating its power to affect children’s vocabulary skills and parents’ in-home literacy practices. Fifteen peer-reviewed, published studies prove Reach Out and Read’s efficacy. During the preschool years, children served by Reach Out and Read score three to six months ahead of their non-Reach Out and Read peers on vocabulary tests, preparing them to start school with the language skills they need to learn to read. In addition, parents who participate in our program are four times more likely to read aloud regularly with their young children.

We currently serve just under 40,000 children in Connecticut, which amounts to 17% of children age 0-5 in the state. Funding by the State of Connecticut will allow us to expand to reach additional children and families in need, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to meet their tremendous innate potential.

I respectfully request that the Children’s Committee support this important bill, and I thank you for your commitment to children and families in Connecticut.

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